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Joint written statement* submitted by the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs of the World Council of Churches, a non-governmental organization in general consultative status, and the World Evangelical Alliance, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[23 August 2018]

* Issued as received, in the language(s) of submission only.

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Nigeria: Government Needs to Do More to Stem the Herdsmen-Farmers Violence

1. The Commission of the Churches on International Affairs of the World Council of Churches and the World Evangelical Alliance would like to bring to the attention of the Human Rights Council recent developments in Nigeria which impact the enjoyment of human rights by the Nigerian population, namely the right to life.

Violence and Insecurity

2. In the first half of 2018, more than 1,300 Nigerians have been killed, and more than 70,000 displaced, as a result of violence between herders and farmers in Nigeria's central states. Violence originating in land-use disputes is exacerbating ethnic tensions and is taking more and more a religious dimension.

3. Over 70 people were killed in January 2018 following weeks of violence between nomadic herdsmen and farmers. Nineteen people, including two priests, were killed in Benue State in April after a gunman opened fire at a church. In June 2018, over 200 people were killed in Jos, the capital city of Plateau State.

4. These attacks are not new. In March 2010, more than 500 people were massacred by herdsmen in Dogon Na Hauwa, the worst such incident in Nigeria's recent history. As increasing drought and desertification reduce available land for the herdsmen's cattle in the northern Sahelian belt, we fear that the violence, killing and internal displacement are likely to increase.

5. We share the assessment of the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for West Africa and the Sahel, Mohamed Ibn Chambas, said that the violence was a major security threat in the region, warning that it risks changing into terrorist attacks.

6. We welcome the adoption of an Anti-Grazing Law in October 2017 by Benue, Taraba, and Adamawa State governments. The law forbids open rearing and grazing of livestock and requires herdsmen to compensate farmers whose crops are destroyed by cattle on their lands. It calls for the establishment of ranches and livestock administration, regulation and control to cater for the herds. However, these laws have failed to reduce tensions between farming and herding communities, as we can see from the sharp rise in violent attacks had occurred since. Furthermore, these laws failed to enact the necessary structural changes, namely encouraging herders to become ranchers.

7. Religion is being used to justify extremism, violence and killings. The violence has taken a religious dimension, involving Muslims and Christians. Sectarian hostility raises the concern of fueling the conflict. Poverty is a contributing factor to the violence because young, uneducated men are sometimes encouraged to commit violent acts in communities in return for payment from extremists and other sponsors who finance such violations for their personal or political benefit.

Government Failure and Inaction

8. The government has failed to address reports of attacks, resulting in a culture of silence. Early June 2018, Nigerian president Muhammadu Buhari had pledged to end the killings in the regions of the Middle Belt. However, only a few weeks later, 200 people were killed, mostly farmers killed by herdsmen.

9. We welcome the Nigerian federal government 'National Livestock Transformation Plan', which aims at permanently solving the farmers-herdsmen clashes in Nigeria. We look forward to seeing this plan and its six pillars unfold, and to seeing healing in the relationship between farmers and herdsmen, and more widely between Muslims and Christians.

10. On 1 August 2018, the Christian Association of Nigeria's Adamawa State chapter addressed a letter to President Muhammadu Buhari, condemning the "mindless massacre" of the predominantly Christian farming communities by Fulani herdsmen, and accusing the president of inaction, despite its repeated calls for toughened security measures.

11. The Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria repeatedly expressed concerns over the inability of the Nigerian government to deal with the situation.

Recommendations to the Government of Nigeria

12. The right to life has been seriously violated by the on-going conflict between predominately Christian farmers and the predominately Muslim Fulani herdsmen. Efforts to improve security have proved to be insufficient. We recommend the deployment of adequate security by the Government in Benue, Plateau, Adamawa, Nasarawa and Taraba states.

13. The culture of impunity concerning violence and killings must be addressed, and perpetrators brought to justice.

14. Adequate security should be provided for worship places.

15. The government should examine ways to address and arbitrate religious conflict on all levels of society, including through roundtable discussions and interfaith dialogue.

16. Regional forums of religious leaders and non-discriminatory grassroots level interfaith dialogue groups should be established with regular meetings and activities aimed at peaceful co-existence, tolerance and interaction, to address misunderstandings, promote learning from each other, and advance mutual respect and harmony. Religious leaders should aim to become agents of peace in their preaching and practice.

Recommendations to the International Community

17. Support the Nigerian government as it further deploys its military, particularly in Benue, Plateau, Adamawa, Nasarawa and Taraba states, and as it implements its National Livestock Transformation Plan.

Internal Displacement

18. Years of insurgency and counterinsurgency operations have resulted in the displacement of approximately 1.9 million people in Nigeria's northeast, particularly Borno state. In more recent years, farmers in Plateau, Benue, and Kaduna States have been particularly affected and displaced as a result of Fulani herdsmen violence.

19. At local workshops organized by the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs of the World Council of Churches, IDPs have reported that the Government has failed to address the violence and that they

cannot return to their villages. They do not trust the military to protect them, so they have armed themselves. They reported that the weapons used in the conflict with the Fulani, as well as in gang and other violence, enter Nigeria through the porous borders with Niger and Chad, and some weapons have been traced to Turkey. The ready accessibility of arms on the black market has added to levels of violence.

20. The IDPs have little or no adequate accommodation, no farmland or access to food, or means of earning a living. They cannot send their children to school, have no access to health care, no clean water and if they drink the water available, they become ill. They have received no compensation for the homes they lost.

Recommendations to the Government of Nigeria

21. The government must tackle the injustice that IDPs have suffered and ensure their safe return journey to their villages and homes.

22. Measures must be taken to address the psychological trauma which is being experienced by those who have suffered violence and displacement.